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ABSTRACT

Because of the increasing emphasis on the treatment and rehabilitative aspects of working with public offenders, it has become necessary to understand in more detail the workings of the correctional system and its personnel. This paper focuses on the correctional setting, the roles, functions and characteristics of effective counselors as perceived by its clients. A work-study model is presented as the preferred model for counselor training. Within this model, development of responsive and initiative skills, problem-solving and program planning skills, and analytical skills are seen as essential ingredients. (Author/PC)

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Who and Why: The Correctional Counselor

Introduction

Universities and colleges, asked to meet the needs for trained counselors, all too often respond along predictable lines with the building of "Ivory Tower" programs which are based on the counselor educator's distorted perceptions of the needs of the numerous helping fields - - - "The way it should be" versus "the way it is." The training of correctional helpers seems to be following the "Ivory Tower" approach which has yet to prove its effectiveness in the training of school, employment or vocational counselors. There appears to be little awareness of or appreciation for the duties, responsibilities, functions or roles and settings of correctional counselors.

This paper will attempt to provide insight about the correctional counselor, his setting, roles, functions, characteristics and conflicts. In addition, an educational model designed to develop effective correctional counselors will be presented.

Setting

In a number of settings, counselors experience high degrees of status which may be translated in terms of

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recognition of helper roles, higher pay scales, professional affiliation, and participation in decision making within the agency. For the counselor working with an offender population, conditions are somewhat different. Treatment and rehabilitation of the offender, although expressed publically for many years, is a relatively new commitment within the criminal justice system.

In a prison setting, the basic philosophy in dealing with inmates is that of custody with treatment programs allowed to flourish so long as they do not interfere with the custody function or the smooth operation of daily routine. The moment an inmate escapes or commits an offense in the institution, the treatment program, its clients and counselors are suspect--cries of "coddling" are raised by the security staff. In some institutional settings, treatment is seen as an extension of the administration's power. It is believed that counselors have a responsibility to report everything in the counseling sessions and in many instances, to discuss only certain topics.

The problem experienced by institutional counselors are similar in nature to those of the probation and parole supervisors. Working in settings where judges determine the type and amount of treatment performed, the probation-parole counselor may become an extension of the legal branch--in essence, a "law enforcer." This occurs through the emphases given to pre-sentence investigation reports, collection of

fines and child support monies. And, what is often meant as treatment is the development of good work habits, positive attitudes toward authority figures and respect for everyone.

The problems experienced by counselors in institutional and non-institutionalized settings are not indicative of all counselors and programs. There are people working with offender populations who find satisfaction in their work, in that they are able to perform adequately and provide needed services for their clients. Reports of successful treatment programs are beginning to surface in the literature. Many states are providing the funds for broadening the scope of services to focus on treatment and rehabilitative programing. However, these programs tend to be focused in one or two settings rather then system wide.

Roles and Functions

Defining the role of any professional presents an immediate conflict between the "ideal" and the "real." It becomes most apparent where offenders are clients because of the rehabilitation-punishment dichotomy. The "ideal" role tends to be defined by the academicians and professional journals. The "real" role tends to be defined by the practioners and the situational variables of which the correctional counselor is a part. (Neil, 1972) In the case of the parole and probation counselor, these roles may be defined by judges, district attorneys, parole boards and

the agency to which one belongs. In institutional settings, the superintendents, correctional officers and other professionals along with the inmates define the roles of the counselor.

The "ideal" role seems to emphasize treatment and rehabilitation. The correctional counselor is supposed to help the offender integrate himself back into society through understanding of himself and thereby gaining independent control over his own behaviors. The correctional counselor is supposed to have the goals of: a) solving immediate problems of social adjustment; b) exploring long-range problems; c) providing supportative guidance for inmates, probationers and parolees. His role is often defined as a coordinator of community resources for the benefit of his client; i.e., a change agent. (Fox, 1972)

The "real" role as seen by a probation officer is one of dealing with heavy caseloads, report gathering, other assigned duties and supervision, consisting of primarily grappling with crisis situations, and really nothing else (Vogt, 1961). Although the rehabilitation aspect has been emphasized by agencies, there has been little support demonstrated by the agency with monies or in time provided to work with the offender.

Probation and parole supervisors asked to define their roles and functions did so in the following manner. "We often see ourselves as servants of the courts and/or pardon

and parole boards." One parole officer said that "supervision time is so short that I feel I am saying 'Look John, you are doing great by yourself--I surely am glad' and John, probably leaves with the attitude of--Whats this crud." When asked to rank their duties in order of importance as defined by their agency, the judge or parole board, the following was obtained: a) parole and pre-sentence investigations; b) attending court; c) legal investigations; d) revocation hearings; e) collection of fines; f) report writing; and last g) supervision and counseling.

Similarily, the institutional counselor expresses feelings in agreement with his counterpart in probation-parole. "When I first came to work as an institutional counselor I expected to develop therapeutic relationships with my clients. In addition, I thought that I would act as a source through which the inmates could channel questions and information to the agency." The following comments portray why the institutional counselor is often unable to function as he would like. "I don't have time to devote to the inmate since my case load is about 500." "Handling personal and dormitory problems for two dorms with populations of 75 inmates, attending staff meetings, classification, adjustment meetings, and disciplinary courts does not allow time for me to develop the relationships we hear about in counseling classes." Other institutional counselors have said that much of their time was spent in

working up evaluations on each inmate for parole consideration.

Faced with these conflicts, the correctional counselor who once had a desire to have a positive impact on the offender, often becomes frustrated and disillusioned. He may feel that he is faced with two alternatives--either get out of the system in which he receives so little nurishment, or become a non-helpful member of that system. Correctional systems and higher education not only must recognize these conflicts but must begin to develop vehicles to provide for their resolution. A suggested vehicle is that of an educational model which focuses on intergrating higher education and corrections and on the developing of correctional counselors who are able to bring together the "real" and the "ideal."

Characteristics of a Correctional Counselor

If professional helpers were to rank clients with regard to difficulty in being worked with, the offender would be near the top. The offender is often assumed to be a "hard-core," low motivated "con-artist" who has a bad attitude toward authority and trusts few if any people. As a client he is seen as being action oriented with little patience for insight or self-awareness oriented counseling. It might appear, based on these assumptions, that a special breed of counselor is needed to work with the offender.

What characteristics should the correctional counselor have? The writers recently asked twelve inmates in a prison setting to list the characteristics they thought a correctional counselor should have. The following are their responses:

"The counselor needs to be able to let me know he understands where I am coming from....He needs to try and understand the ground rules we have....He should indicate some understanding of how we feel before he starts giving advice or making suggestions."

"He should show that he respects me, not that he has to agree with me but, he lets me have my own ideas....He needs to allow me some input....I don't want to feel like a pawn.. ...He shows respect by not coming from the 'Jump-street' (not prejudging me)....He won't get any respect from me unless he show me some."

"He has to show that it's more than just a job by being with us outside of counseling....He needs to follow-up his words with action....He should be part of the group and not play a role." The offenders indicated other characteristics that they saw as essential. First, that the counselor will have to earn credits before he can jump in. Second, the counselor is going to have to be tough enough to realize he will be "conned" without becoming defensive. Third, the counselor has to be healthier than the offender, in other words, have his own "head together." The effective

counselor then is one who has a "facilitative toughness" which allows him to back up his words with appropriate action while still understanding the feelings and worth of the offender.

It appears that offenders are perceptive enough to identify the same counselor characteristics found in the counseling literature: understanding, respect, commitment. The authors, however, find few counselors in correctional settings who have "facilitative toughness." Why is this? Often an agency or institution is located in a remote area away from a large city or has a low salary scale which makes it difficult to attract people who have been appropriately trained. As a result, we find people entering the correctional counseling field with a range of previous job experiences and undergraduate training i.e., animal husbandry, aeronautical administration, spanish, music and economics. In many instances, the correctional counselor has been brought up through the ranks. He is a correctional officer who couldn's cut it anywhere else in the institution, a probation/parole officer who is inadequate in investigative work or an ex-offender whose only credentials are that he/she made it. These counselors are tough, confrontative and "tell it like it is." More recently, corrections has been employing "professional" counselors who have been trained in traditional counseling approaches. These counselors would like to humanize corrections and as a

result often see confrontation, directness and toughness as being incongruent to counseling. To the old line correctional counselor this new breed are seen as "marshmallows" who can talk but not act. What is needed are counselors who can provide the facilitative conditions of empathy, respect and warmth in conjunction with appropriate intervention strategies; confrontation, role playing, behavioral contracting.

Training

Traditionally, the university has been seen as the producer and the correctional system as the consumer of counselors with little awareness of each other's needs. The university by its very nature has elements that hinder its development of educational programs designed to meet the needs of corrections i.e., focus on the academic elite, stress on specialization areas, antivocationalism, strangling curriculum and backward directed innovation (Polk, 1969).

Stewart (1972) compared counselor training programs to automobiles in that internally they remain essentially the same despite the heralded differences which are primarily external trappings. Although counselor training is not without innovation, it tends to be in individual courses rather than in total programs. There is a need to develop educational models and training processes that can bring higher education and corrections together. Although

neither new nor innovative, work-study has received little attention for the education of counselors. This is unfortunate since work-study has advantages for corrections and universities not available in traditional on-campus models (Neil, 1973). Specifically, the work-study program at the University of Georgia has revealed the following:

1. The everyday experiences of the participant acts as a vehicle for the immediate implementation of classroom material.
2. The counselor educator is able to move theory closer to practice by direct contact and involvement in work settings of students. A distinct advantage of this approach is the establishment of a "base" with supervisory personnel in the agency, thus making the teaching of course work at the university more creditable to the consumers.
3. The agency has equal input with respect to what skills are taught.
4. At a time when graduate programs are turning out more students than jobs, each work-study student has a job.
5. The university and correctional agency are provided a common ground for moving into areas other than training.

Indirect benefits generated by a work-study program are lower turnover of personnel (Settles, 1968), greater

agreement as to goals and objectives for corrections by counselor educator and agency, and for personnel, the opportunity to maintain effectiveness through contact with other professionals and ideas.

An educational model is by itself insufficient for the development of effective counselors. The training itself should focus on developing the characteristics and human potential qualities identified earlier in this paper by the offender. It is not surprising that these characteristics are similar to those identified by Rogers (1957) and Truax and Carkhuff (1965).

In 1969, an in-the-field study focusing on developing these human potential qualities in correctional counselors, was conducted at the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. Correctional officers receiving this training significantly improved their ability to understand the inmate and communicate higher levels of respect and genuineness. Their impact with inmates resulted in a decrease in absenteeism in work and fewer write-ups of inmates (Megathlin, 1969).

The training model, incorporated in the University of Georgia's work-study program, attempts to develop in three phases of 15 quarter hours each of the skills described below

1. Responsive and initiative interpersonal dimensions that provide the base of operations for helping are systematicly developed in a model similar to

Carkhuff's (1972). Theories of human development and social interaction provide the intellectual foundation for the process of helping.

2. Problem solving and use of appropriate intervention strategies are seen as essential for the correctional counselor. Trainees are taught individual appraisal and decision making skills that enable them to operationalize the needs of the offender. Intervention strategies, such as behavioral therapies, role playing and structured experiences provide the trainee with a wider repertory and enhance the possibility of sucess with the offender (Neil & Jones, 1973).
3. Integration and application of course work to meet the needs of the offender, the agency and the trainee is culminated through exploration of professional issues, agency concerns and critical analyses of rehabilitation programs with offender populations. In addition, research is initiated which is designed to provide useful feedback to the trainee's work setting.

Summary

Because of the increasing emphasis on the treatment and rehabilitative aspects of working with offender populations, it has become necessary to understand in more detail the

workings of the correctional system and its personnel. This paper focused on the correctional setting, the roles and functions, and the characteristics of effective counselors as seen by its clients. In addition, a work-study model was presented which is seen as the preferred model for developing counselors. Within the work-study model, training in responsive and initiative skills, problem solving and program planning skills and the theoretical foundation for critically analyzing the corrections system are seen as essential ingredients.

This paper does not presume to know all of the answers, rather it is hoped that it will provide the spark for the development of educational models for counselors which not only integrate higher education and agencies but also, develop the skills necessary for helping clients within the system.

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